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A Very Scarce little volume by the well-known author of "The Sonnet in England."

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VERSES OF A PROSE-WRITER

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VERSES

OF

A PROSE-WRITER

BY

JAMES ASHCROFT NOBLE

AUTHOR OF

'THE PELICAN PAPERS,' 'MORALITY IN ENGLISH FICTION,' ETC. ETC.

EDINBURGH: DAVID DOUGLAS

1887

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TO MY WIFE

Of the poor treasure in my little store
For thee, dear wife, the rarest and the best
I fain would choose; but Love can give no more
Than Love possesses, therefore I will rest
Content in the sweet thought that eyes of thine,
Scanning these pages tenderly, may find
Something to prize, if but because 'tis mine—
To love, for hint of what remains behind.

J. A. N.

829800

PREFATORY NOTE

SOME of the following poems appeared in a little book of mine which has long been out of print; others have been published in various sonnet anthologies; and a few are reprinted from periodicals; but the greatest number appear for the first time in this volume. I may add that the ballad entitled "The Red Thread of Honour" had been written and printed long before I discovered that it had been anticipated by a fine poem, identical in subject and similar in treatment, from the pen of Sir Francis Doyle. That two writers, working independently of each other, should have been attracted by such

a subject is not surprising; and I mention the matter only to vindicate myself beforehand from a possible, and, at first sight, not unreasonable charge of plagiarism.

J. A. N.

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VERSES OF A PROSE-WRITER

AN INVITATION

Come when Spring touches with gentle finger
The snows that linger
Among the hills;
When to our homestead return the swallows,
And in the hollows
Bloom daffodils.

Or, if thou tarry, come with the Summer,
That welcome comer,
Welcome as he;
When noon-tide sunshine beats on the meadow,
A seat in shadow
We'll keep for thee.

Or, if it please thee, come to the reaping,
When to safe keeping
They bring the sheaves;
When Autumn decketh with coloured splendour
And pathos tender
The dying leaves.

Or come and warm us when Winter freezes,
And northern breezes
Are keen and cold,
With loving glances, and close hand-pressings,
And fervent blessings
That grow not old.

Nay! do not linger; for each to-morrow
Will break in sorrow
If thou delay:
Come to us quickly; our hearts are burning
With tender yearning:
Come, come to-day.

A BROKEN GOBLET

Oh! could I give to thee, my love,
A heart like that which once was mine;
Could I life's goblet see, my love,
Filled once again with sparkling wine,
Our days might then be half-divine.

But all the wine is spilled, my love,
Ah, me, the spilling, it was sad!
That cup can ne'er be filled, my love,
The days are dead when, as a lad,
The rich grape-perfume made me glad.

I raised the goblet high, my love,
Between mine eyes and the strong sun;

My lips and throat were dry, my love,
With great desire to take but one
Deep draught before my days were done.

There came one from the South, my love,
Ah me, but she was very fair!
With tender, tremulous mouth, my love,
And deep soft eyes and golden hair,—
Sunlight was brighter, striking there.

I seem to see her stand, my love,
As in the days that now are dead;
The goblet in one hand, my love,
The other held a rose full red;—
Ah me, the rose-leaves soon were shed!

Those lips spoke pleasant things, my love;
Those eyes undid me utterly;
And like close-netted strings, my love,
Her clinging hair imprisoned me,
And I cared nowise to be free.

I tell to you this tale, my love;
Ev'n now your sweet eyes fill with tears;
I cannot weep or wail, my love,
As I could once, in the young years
Ere I had done with hopes and fears.

But listen longer still, my love:
She gave the goblet unto me,
She bade me drink my fill, my love,
Saying, "Life's goblet foams for thee;"
And then she watched me eagerly.

I raised it to my mouth, my love,
I tasted once that sweet strange draught;
And then she from the South, my love,
Raised her lithe arm, and then a waft
Of air I felt, and then she laughed.

And there upon the ground, my love,
The goblet lay that had been mine!

And the rank weeds around, my love,
Drank deeply of that perfect wine
Whose blood-red stain seemed like a sign.

And then she rose and stood, my love,
And looked and laughed full in my face;
(Were those stains wine or blood, my love?
I cannot tell.) A moment's space
She gazed and stood still in her place.

And then she turned and went, my love,
A low, strange, thrilling song sang she;
And as she went she sent, my love,
The rose-leaves floating heavily
Downward: she cast no glance at me.

And I lay there as dead, my love,
What had been *me* indeed had died;
As rose plucked from the bed, my love,
Its petals scattered far and wide,
Blown by wild winds from every side.

And so I say again, my love,
The life that has been now is o'er;
Give not thyself the pain, my love,
Of waiting on a low, lone shore,
A broken wave that comes no more.

But leave me still alone, my love;
Why didst thou give thine heart to me?
Keep it: it is thine own, my love,
And turn thee quickly; turn and flee,
Lest death like mine lay hold on thee.

Yet could I give to thee, my love,
The heart that in those days was mine,—
Could I life's goblet see, my love,
Remade, refilled with sparkling wine,
Perchance thou might'st be mine—I thine.

LOVED AT LAST

And so he loves me, though they said
No lover e'er would come to me,
That I should ne'er be wooed or wed,
Or nurse a child upon my knee:
They were so sure that I should miss
The woman's heritage of bliss.

And I, too, in the sad gray hours
When through low clouds no sunlight shone,
And when the slow September showers
Seemed Nature's tears for Summer gone,—
I murmured with a long sad sigh,
"My Summer also has gone by!"

But now I know that what to me
Seemed Autumn rains were showers of Spring:
Summer has come, and now I see
Love's sunlight brighten everything:
He says he loves me, and to-day
My year rolls back to early May.

How did it come? I ask of him;
He says my face is very fair,
And yet to me these eyes seem dim,
And on this brow are lines of care;
But now these eyes shall yet be bright,
And once again this brow grow light.

He loves me! loves me! I repeat
The blest assurance every hour;
And now the wine of life is sweet
That yesterday was sharp and sour;
Now with glad heart I gaily sup
Love's nectar from a golden cup.

I look through long slow-coming years,
Made by his lóve all bright and fair;
I look around through happy tears,
And see his image everywhere;
In his great love I breathe and live,
If it be sin, dear God, forgive.

It cannot be! Since I have known
His love, God's love seems dearer too;
He has come near to me and shown
What for the humblest He can do.
Life's fateful fingers intertwine
The human love with the divine.

O Love, Love, Love! O blesséd word
That never did I understand
Till in my ear his voice I heard
And felt the pressure of his hand:
No more I walk with eyes cast down;
I am his queen, love is my crown.

SHE AND I

Why do I love my love so well?
Why is she all in all to me?
I try to tell, I cannot tell,
It still remains a mystery.
And why to her I am so dear
I cannot tell although I try,
Unless I find both answers here:—
She is herself, and I am I.

Her face is very sweet to me,
Her eyes beam tenderly on mine;
But can I say I never see
Face fairer, eyes that brighter shine;

This thing I surely cannot say,
If I speak truth and do not lie;
Yet here I am in love to-day,
For she's herself, and I am I.

It cannot be that I fulfil
Completely all her girlish dreams;
For far beyond my real still
Her old ideal surely gleams.
And yet I know her love is mine,
A flowing spring that cannot dry:
What explanation? This, in fine,—
She is herself, and I am I.

'Mid all the cords by which two hearts
Are drawn together into one,
This is a cord that never parts,
But strengthens as the years roll on;
And though, as seasons hurry past,
Strength, beauty, wit, and genius die,

Till death strike *us* this charm will last—
She is herself, and I am I.

She is herself and I am I,—
Now, henceforth, evermore the same,
Till the dark angel draweth nigh,
And calleth her and me by name:
Yea, after death has done his worst,
Each risen soul will straightway fly
To meet the other: as at first
She'll be herself, I shall be I.

LOVE'S QUESTIONINGS

Oh! what is lovelier than my lady's face,
The speaking silence of her soft gray eyes,
The lines of the fair features where I trace
The outlines of a soul divinely wise,
Yet all alive with human sympathies?

What more enchanting than my lady's smile,
Welcomer when it flutters on her lips,
So still before, than is the ocean isle
To weary mariners in storm-beat ships,
Or the new sunlight after an eclipse?

What is more thrilling than my lady's touch?
My heart leaps at the pressure of her hand,

With wild tumultuous ecstasy; yet such
Is its sweet sorcery—hard to understand—
Again it calms me like a fairy's wand.

Oh, what more rapturous than my lady's kiss?
It burns upon my lips like living flame,
And leaves me silent with excess of bliss,
To which my stammering verse can give no name,
For love has mysteries which put words to shame.

What need for further question? They who know
Love's secret can the answer well divine:
These things are full of all delights; but oh!
Much fuller that of which they are a sign,—
The love that lives in them and makes them mine.

A DEAD PAST

Unrest like to that of seas at even
When the sun has left the stormy sky,
And the stars are few and faint in heaven,
And the wind moans and the curlews cry ;—

Yearning as of watchers for the morning,
Waiting with sad hunger for the day,
Filled with scorching griefs and sore self-scorning,
Yet with pride that will not let them pray ;—

Sorrow like to sorrow for the dying
Or the dead we see no more again,
Sighs and groans and bitter tearless crying,
Wrung from out a plenitude of pain ;—

These were mine ;—you know the strange sad story
Of the wrong that dragged my spirit down ;
Who should know but you who gave the glory
Of your love for ring and robe and crown ?

In love's heaven we sit enthroned together ;
I the slave am king, and you my queen ;
Winter is past : lo ! sunshine and spring weather !
We will forget the things that once have been.

Nay, we will not ! we will still remember
All the darkness of that bygone day ;
Thoughts of storms that swept through life's December
Fill with fuller joy its stormless May.

A LOVE'S LIFE

'Twas springtime of the day and year,
Clouds of white fragrance veiled the thorn,
My heart unto her heart drew near,
And ere the dew had fled the morn
Sweet love was born.

An August noon, an hour of bliss
That stands amid my hours alone,
A word, a look, then—ah, that kiss!—
Joy's robe was rent, her secret known,
Love was full grown.

And now this drear November eve
What has to-day seen done, heard said?
It boots not; who has tears to grieve
For that last leaf the tree has shed
Or for love dead?

ONE EVENING

I was her lover, faithful and tender,
She was my darling, dear unto me;
Love with its terror and love with its splendour
Came to our hearts as we stood by the sea.

Can I forget it?—that still August even
When in the wan waves the red sun had set,
How a new star swam into my heaven—
Dare I remember it? Can I forget?

My heaven is empty; my star has departed;
Starlight and sunlight are one light to me;
Can I be dreaming that gay and light-hearted
I and my darling stood here by the sea?

HALCYON DAYS

O DAYS of rest!

The long dull year of toil had fled away,
The hours were mine to dally with at will,
They were my slaves with whom to take my fill
Of pleasure, mine to speak, theirs to obey.
Upon the cool green grass at ease I lay,
My brow by the soft breeze of June caressed,
I knew joy's untold secret and was blest:

O days of rest!

O days of calm!

The freedom from the turmoil and the din,
The noisy strife of tongues, the wordy war
Heard but as a faint echo from afar

In that sweet garden where my soul did win
The boon of peace; to which there entered in
No evil thing that could annoy or harm,
But for the vexed heart there was bounteous balm—
O days of calm!

O days of love!
When my lone spirit felt no more alone
But found her fellows who had sought her long,
As she had sought for them with yearnings strong,
And knew the kinship that had been unknown.
For then to me Love's precious things were shown—
All Love's sweet treasury—while from above
Came soft low cooings of the turtle-dove:
O days of love!

O vanished days!
Ye have gone hence and left me here to weep,
Yet with my tears I mingle smile and song;
To me for ever those dear days belong,

Within my inmost heart of hearts I keep
Their memory green, and oft in happy sleep
Fair dreams bring anodynes to dull my pain,
And when I wake I cry "Come, come again—
O vanished days!"

OUR DREAM

PERCHANCE to men it may not be given
To know things real from things that seem;
If, living on earth, we dream of heaven
Why, then, I hold it better to dream.

Let us dream on 'mid the splendid shadows
That make existence a gladsome thing,
The dim deep woods and the flowery meadows
Where fairies frolic and skylarks sing;

Where bright shapes linger, and angel faces
Glow in the gleam of a visioned day,
And o'er the uplands on grassy spaces
Fond lovers wander, fair children play.

Let no dream still, then, nor strive to sever
Things that are real from things that seem,
Let us slumber on for ever and ever
And know no waking from life's glad dream.

UNENDING

I SEE that all these things come to an end,
The things we glory in, the things we fear;
Annihilation's shadow still doth lend
Its gloom to every pleasant thing and dear:
Each heavy burden under which we bend
Will some day from our wearied shoulders move;
One thing alone there is which hath no end—
There is no end to Love.

There is an end to kisses and to sighs;
There is an end to laughter and to tears;
An end to fair things that delight our eyes;
An end to pleasant sounds that charm our ears;

An end to enmity's foul libelling,
And to the gracious praise of tender friend;
There is an end to all but one sweet thing—
To Love there is no end.

That warrior carved an empire with his sword,
The empire now is but like him—a name;
That statesman spoke, and by a burning word
Kindled a nation's heart into a flame:
Now nought is life but ashes, and we bring
Our homage to new men, to them we bend:
There is an end to all but one sweet thing—
To Love there is no end.

All beauty fades away, or else, alas!
Our eyes grow dim, and we no beauty see;
The glorious shows of Nature pass and pass,
Quickly they come, as quickly do they flee:

And he who hears the voice of welcoming
Hears next the slow sad farewell of his friend:
There is an end to all but one sweet thing—
To Love there is no end.

And for ourselves—our father, where is he?
Gone, and a memory alone remains;
There is no refuge on a mother's knee
For us, grown old and sad with cares and pains:
Brotherless, sisterless, our way we wend
To Death's dark house from which we shall not rove;
And so we cease: yet one thing hath no end—
There is no end to Love.

THE HORIZON

Oh would, oh would that thou and I,
Now this brief day of love is past,
Could toward the sunset straightway fly
And fold our wearied wings at last
There, where the sea-line meets the sky.

A sweet thing and a strange 'twould be
Thus, thus to break our prison bars,
And know that we at last were free
As voiceful waves and silent stars,—
There, where the sky-line meets the sea.

But vain the longing ! thou and I,
As we have been must ever be,
Yet thither, wind, oh waft my sigh,
There, where the sky-line meets the sea,—
There, where the sea-line meets the sky.

AN EMBLEM IN BLUE AND WHITE

A VIRTUOSO's cabinet
Stands in a dim deserted room,
Close curtained to a twilight gloom;
And, touched by one thin ray of light,
A quaint old cup of blue and white
Upon the upper shelf is set.

The single sun-ray struggles through,
There, where the curtains fail to meet.
Outside them is the ugly street;
Within, the dimness hides from me
The gathered treasures, and I see
Only that cup of white and blue.

Strange seems it that the narrow shaft,
With shining motes in circling rings,
Should leave untouched the precious things
That lie about the shadowed place
To glorify with ghostly grace
This simple piece of potter's craft.

My thought, which had begun to dose,—
The quietness was so profound,—
Suddenly waked, for all around
Stood the dead folk whose hands of old
The simple cup were wont to hold,
Their faces full of long repose.

The eyes of all were fixed and set
On one place only, gathering up
Strange memories of the little cup:
Again the turmoil, anguish, strife,
Love, ecstasy of earthly life,
Were with them, and their eyes were wet.

What said the cup to them? It told
To one a tale of childish play;
To one it brought again the day
By death made sacred; unto all
It was a mute memorial .
Of bells that chimed and bells that knolled.

To each of them the ancient self
Became a thing of yestermorn;
Dead joys, loves, hates were all reborn:
And the strange spell that brought them back
Was in that piece of *bric-à-brac*—
The little cup upon the shelf.

Such life was in it still; and yet
Here, as a dead thing, it had stood,
Coldly appraised as "something good
In blue and white." Amid the gloom
It now had found a costly tomb
In a rich idler's cabinet.

What emblem in the thing? Well, you
May know it one day, when you find
Some love has left its life behind;
Yet keeps in death so much of grace
That on your shelf it finds a place—
An unused cup of white and blue.

There will it stand amid your store,
Only a curious dainty thing;
Yet, when you see it, it will bring
From out the thickly-peopled vast
Of memory a day long past,—
A dead day that shall live no more.

"THE YEARS TAKE ALL"

"The years take all and leave us nought;"
So says the song I sing to-day:
This is the lesson time has taught
To me—to thousands passed away.

The years take all! The wild delight
Of that young day when first the earth
Reveals her beauty to our sight
With rapture like a second birth;—

When round our head the airs of heaven
Seem to play softly, and our eyes
Gaze on the glories God has given,
As Adam gazed in paradise;—

The exultation of the hour
When battles fought at last are won;
When in our souls we feel that power
Is born, that a great deed is done;—

All boyhood's dreams, all hopes of youth,
So quick to rise, so slow to fall;
How sad the inevitable truth,—
The years take all! The years take all!

Yet is it true, this strange sad thought,—
When youth has gone doth nothing stay?
Have I not memories that are fraught
With benediction for to-day?

If in my breast I feel no more
The ancient ardour for the fight,
Still I am not without a store
Of trophies brave—a goodly sight.

What life has given I have and hold;
Time ne'er can call me to resign
Her treasures rich and manifold:
They are myself—the years are mine.

So I no more my voice will lend
To the sad song that I have sung;
For though some raptures have an end,
The purest joys are ever young.

And though the things most prized depart
Beyond the reach of Love's recall,
Love's self lives on: the loving heart
Can never say, "The years take all!"

MURIEL'S DAY

With dark eyes full of night's own splendour,
Abiding still, though now 'tis day,
With glances brave and strong and tender,
Of all defenceless things defender,
    Sweet Muriel stands
    With outstretched hands,
And with the wonder of a soul new born
    Salutes life's morn.

High in the heavens the glad sun rises,
Dawn's dew and wonder are behind;
But still with ever fresh surprises
The day her mind and soul baptizes,

And here is Love
From heaven above,
Waiting to give to Muriel his boon
When comes her noon.

The day declines, the night is nigher,
But Muriel waits nor fears the night;
Her heart knows only one desire,—
To keep Love's house, to tend his fire,
Whose constant spark
Burns through the dark
Till He, Love's Lord and hers, shall say
"Lo! it is day!"

THE RED THREAD OF HONOUR

A MODERN BALLAD

Among the hills of India
Dwelt warriors fierce and bold,
The sons of robber chieftains
Who, in the days of old,
Fought for their mountain freedom,
And, if by Fate laid low,
Fell ever crowned with honour—
Their faces to the foe.

Now 'twas an ancient custom
Among those hillsmen brave,
When thus they found their kinsman,
To dig for him no grave;

But the torn blood-stained garments
They stripped from off the dead,
And then his wrist they circled
With green or crimson thread.

Many the green-decked warriors,
But only for a few
Was kept that highest honour,
The thread of sanguine hue;
For 'twas alone the bravest
Of those who nobly shed
Their life-blood in the battle
Whose wrists were bound with red.

And when they thus had graced them
Who fell before the foe,
They hurled their lifeless bodies
Into the plain below.

The earth did ne'er imprison
Those hillsmen brave and free,
The sky alone should cover
The warriors of Trukkee.

There came a time of conflict,
And a great armèd throng
Of England's bravest soldiers,—
Avengers of the wrong,—
Marched through the gloomy gorges,
Forded the mountain rills,
Vowing that they would vanquish
Those robbers of the hills.

The road was strange and dubious;
Easy it was to stray;
And of those English soldiers
Eleven lost their way.

Led by a trusty leader,
They reached a fearful glen,
And saw a mountain stronghold
Guarded by forty men.

Guarded by forty veterans
Of that fierce robber band,
In every face defiance,
Weapons in every hand.
"Back!" cried the trusty leader;
The soldiers would not hear,
But up the foe-crowned mountain
Charged with their English cheer.

With loud huzzas they stormed it,
Nor thought to turn from death,
But for Old England's honour
Yielded their latest breath.

Short was the fight but deadly,
For, when our last man fell,
But sixteen of that forty
Were left the tale to tell.

But those sixteen were noble—
They loved a brave deed done;
They knew a worthy foeman,
And treated him as one.
And when the English soldiers
Sought for their comrades slain,
They found their stiff stark corpses
Prostrate upon the plain:
They lay with blood-stained faces,
Fixed eyes, and firm-clenched fists,
But the Red Thread of Honour,
Was twined around their wrists.

"TO CARLYLE, AND BACK AGAIN"

When ill at ease a creed I sought,
Dissatisfied with all yet taught,
Because in each I seemed to find
A hint of something more behind
The veil, which might if seen by me
Bring clearness out of mystery;—
When in the dark I sought for one
Support to rest my soul upon,
Some Being before whom to fall,
And cry "Thou art the Lord of all,
Therefore my Lord!"—and seeking long,
And calling out in anguish strong,

Because the search seemed wholly vain,
And I found nought but weary pain—
A voice came suddenly to me
Which seemed to end my misery.

The voice said to me, "Doth thy soul
Wander through heaven seeking a pole,
A guiding star; and dost thou roam
Through the wide earth to find a home
Of God—some consecrated fane
Where in rapt worship all thy pain
And unrest may forgotten be,
As if they ne'er had haunted thee?
If this thou seekest now thy search
May have an end, though neither Church
Nor priest can lead thy steps aright,
For they too wander in the night.
Thou hast a head and thou hast hands,
And the quick life in thee demands

That thou life's labour should'st not shirk,
But find (nor leave when found) thy work:
This done, learn thou from day to day
That thus to labour is to pray!"

"O voice," I cried with spirit free,
"A secret thou hast taught to me:
Problems that did my spirit foil
Solutions find in daily toil.
If work be worship, this indeed
Is ampler truth than any creed!"

My joy was great; but soon again
Dull mists of doubt o'erspread my brain.
Work may be worship—but of whom?
In the wide universe is room
For many gods and lords; and how
May I know Him to whom I bow?
How learn whether He be indeed

The Being whom my soul doth need?
The voice has told me what is true,
But surely this of old I knew;
And something more my spirit needs
Than unknown masters—broken reeds.
I cannot tell to whom I pray
Working in darkness day by day:
I worship as I delve the mine,
I worship as I rear the vine,
I worship as I turn the sod,
Perhaps a fiend—perhaps a god.
"O God," I cried, "I know Thou art,
Or else my sore distracted heart
Had ne'er been drawn mysteriously
Into the dark to search for Thee;
And, knowing that Thou art, I know
I must find Thee, or else find woe:
I weary of my toilsome quest,
Solve Thou my doubts and give me rest."

Then suddenly, as if from deep
And thickly-peopled dreamy sleep
I had awaked, my awful doubt
Was like a nightmare put to rout
In one sweet moment; and I saw
With undimmed eye the one sure law
Through which alone can peace be won
By those who toil beneath the sun.

Find work; but find thy Master first,
Or all thy toil may be accursed;
If thou would'st free thyself from doubt
Find God within, and work without,
That shall be worthy worship will
Be thine, and calm thy spirit fill.
Seek Him, nor think He hideth far
In some slow-circling distant star;
From thine own self set thyself free,
And thou shalt find He seeketh thee.

He seeketh thee from morn till eve,
Although thou dost His goodness grieve ;
He seeketh thee to show thee all
The work on this terrestrial ball
Thou hast to do ; not that alone,
For when His service thou hast done,
He finds thee rest beneath the tree
That grows beside the crystal sea.

THE BROOKLET

Within a little sheltered dale
Where flowery splendours never fail,
Where Spring is glad, and Summer fair,
And Autumn glories rich and rare,
Where even Winter has a grace
And comes with genial kindly face—
A humble quiet hut I found
Set in a plot of garden ground.

I came, and saw, and loved the spot,
Made it my own, and murmured not
That in its utter solitude
The human world did ne'er intrude.

The vale was mine, its flowers were fair,
The soul of peace was in the air;
I had my friends—the stars, the sun,
The brook that near my door did run.

And often did I lie and dream
Beside that sparkling babbling stream;
Sun, stars, flowers, birds, and all the rest
I loved, but loved that brooklet best:
As if with life like mine endued
It had a voice for every mood
Of mirth or sadness, joy or dole,
It was to me a fellow soul.

May came with all her wealth of flowers,
And June with fragrant sleepy hours,
And through July the blinding glare
And parching heat filled all the air;
The sun shot burning arrows down,
The cool green grass grew hot and brown,

The swallows seemed too tired to fly,
And then, ah me! the stream ran dry.

Perchance it seems a little thing,
The drying of that tiny spring,
But 'twas no little thing to me
To loose its cheering company;
It was a friend, my only one,
Whose voice in every changing tone
Spoke alway to my listening ear
Strange prophecies of hope and fear.

A friend! 'twas more; it was the voice
Of my own soul—it did rejoice
As I rejoiced, and when I wept
It murmured low, and as I slept
It made fair dreams for me, and seemed
To sing strange music as I dreamed.
Now there was silence, and to me
Silence was one with misery.

It still is silent, and I lie
Beside its course beneath the sky
Searching the blank bright blue in vain
For promise of the blessèd rain;
Hot pebbles in the brooklet's bed,
Hot air around my aching head,
A hot sun in the cloudless sky,
My stream will evermore be dry.

But no! high up among the trees
The ghostly rustle of a breeze;
One clear bird note piped out aloud
To harbinger the thunder cloud;—
The darkness grows,—a blinding flash,—
A moment's pause,—and then the crash.
I laugh, I leap; here is the rain;
My stream will flow, speak, sing again.

And now once more I have a voice,
Once more I sing, once more rejoice,

Once more the murmur of the stream
Fills with fair shapes my nightly dream;
The voice I lost I now have found;
My little dell is fairy ground.
Joy courses through my veins like wine
And still the brooklet's voice is mine.

EVENING CALM

The sun is sinking slowly in the west,
A broadening silver light is on the sea,
The calm which evening brings reigns in the breast,
And gentle voices seem to speak to me.

Those voices come, but why will they not stay?
Why has the bird of calm such wandering wings?
Why do these tranquil moments pass away
So quickly? They should not be transient things.

They should not go could I detain them here;
I would have evening always with its balm;
The noontide weariness, the nightly fear,
Should never mar the spirit's blissful calm.

And yet, perchance, if calm could thus be made
Eternal here it would be calm no more;
I might grow weary of the evening shade,
And of the sunset light upon the shore.

I might sigh longingly for starry night,
Or languish for the fresh life-giving morn,
Or even say, "Oh for the noon-day light,
Had I but it the heat might well be borne."

So it is best this soft sweet light should go,
And day die gorgeously across the sea
In red and amber robes—a glorious show,
And that this calm should pass away from me.

And yet not wholly pass: the life once known
But for a moment lives in us for aye;
The joy we once have grasped and made our own
No years nor ages can take quite away.

TIRED

For joy in odorous flowery places,
In breezy hilltops, in sunlit leas,
In smiles slow-breaking on baby faces,
In all the poets' fine fantasies,
In the best of love when love is giving
The best she has, when one glance of an eye
Suffices to prove life well worth living,
Too tired am I.

Too tired, how tired I can scarcely reckon,
For the sense sinks deep, and the heart beats slow;
From some blessèd isle did the sirens beckon,
My laggard limbs would refuse to go.

To their songs I should faintly wearily listen,
With nought of desire but a long-drawn sigh,
And no gleam to answer the eyes that glisten,
So tired am I.

What do I ask but to lie for ever,
Here in a half-dream, apart from life,
What do I crave but to rise up never,
To know no longer the sterile strife;
Or better, to feel the sod light pressing
Its daisy rootlets against my breast,
Be it life, be it death,—what boots it guessing,
It must be rest.

IN FAIRYLAND

WHERE is this place of wonder,
This mystic woodland glade?
How did I wander hither?
How have my footsteps strayed?
Strange are the trees that shadow
The bank whereon I lie,
And strange the flowers that border
The brook that ripples by.

How long have I been lying
Prone in the woodland here?
How long have I been waiting
For something drawing near?

What it may be I know not,
But coming 'tis I know,
For silver bells are chiming
And golden trumpets blow.

And now the bells chime faster,
Shrill is the trumpet's tone,
The woodland rings with voices,
I am no more alone.
What bursts of fairy laughter,
What strains of elfin song,
As the dear friends of childhood
The grassy spaces throng.

There's Jack who climbed the beanstalk,
There's Cinderella's car,
And Jack who killed the giants
Comes with his spoils of war;

And a third Jack named Horner
Carries his Christmas pie,
And while he sucks a luscious plum
Soberly passes by.

Red Riding Hood skips gaily,
She fears the wolf no more,
For cold and dead he's lying
Outside her grandam's door.
Yonder is tufted Riquet,
Hop o' my Thumb is there,
And three bears dance attendance
On little Goldenhair.

There are the pretty babies
The robins hid with leaves,
And clever Morgiana
Who tricked the forty thieves;

Aladdin from his palace
And Sinbad from the sea,
And good Haroun Alraschid
Are here in company.

Alnaschar seems but gloomy,
And Bluebeard's face is grim,
For Fatima and sister Ann
No longer walk with him.
They pass him gaily laughing,
Their brothers by their side,
And mockingly they whisper,
"Go seek another bride."

There comes the gracious beauty
Yet beaming with the bliss
Born when her sleep was broken
By fairy prince's kiss;

And yet another beauty
Who loved the beast of old,
Walks by her love, a beast no more,
All decked with gems and gold.

That dog is Mother Hubbard's,
With Puss-in-boots he walks,
Before the sheep of wee Bo-peep
The ugly duckling stalks;
Here Jack and Jill come running
Little Boy Blue to meet,
While Valentine and Orson
Fondly each other greet.

And now they vanish slowly,
But ever as they go
The silver bells keep chiming,
The golden trumpets blow;

Where is this place of wonder,
This mystic woodland glade?
How did I wander hither?
How have my footsteps strayed?

But as I ask the question
The music dies away,
And round me ring the voices
Of children at their play;
For I am in my study,
And Philip, Kate, and Clare
Say I have slept quite long enough,
Here in my easy-chair.

They want just one new story
Before to bed they go;
They say they've waited half an hour
While I've been snoring so;

And though that is a libel,
I tell them where I've been,
And of the wondrous vision
My sleeping eyes have seen.

And then they run away to bed,
And in their dreams I know
Those silver bells will chime again,
Those golden trumpets blow.
God bless them, now and evermore,
Sweet Phil and Kate and Clare,
And with them bless, O blessed Lord,
All children everywhere.

WITHOUT A MASK

"He [Blake] was a man without a mask."—Samuel Palmer, quoted in Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake.*

A WAKING vision came to me :
'Twas of a hurrying, surging crowd,
Restless as is the restless sea,
And with a voice as deep and loud ;
A sea of women and of men,
With waves that rose and fell again.

Afar at first, I nigher drew,
And mingled with that eager throng,
Its devious mazes winding through,
And wondering, while I passed along,

That, as each man pursued his task,
His face was hid behind a mask.

No man, no woman of them all,
Whose countenance I could behold,
And never one of them let fall
The hiding mask: they bought and sold,
They fought and feasted, lost and gained,
And still the masks their place retained.

Varied these faces, false and dead;
Some wore a philosophic frown,
And some there were with smiles bespread,
And some gazed up and others down;
Some had sage looks arranged by rule,
And some the features of the fool.

All had one mask, but some had two,—
An outer one for common wear,
And for a sacred chosen few
An inner one divinely fair;

And those to whom they showed it cried—
"We know thee, and are satisfied."

It was a strangely fearsome sight,
That never-ending masquerade:
I know not why, but sore affright
Possessed my soul; I was afraid
Because I knew that all could see
My face, and read its mystery.

But, as I turned to flee away,
I saw a sight that made me stand
And pause awhile, half in dismay
And half in joy, for 'mid the band
One face there was unmasked like mine,
Calm, strong, unfearing, most benign.

He thrid the throng with step assured,
And gazed around with placid eyes;
He looked like one who had endured
And could endure; serenely wise,

Having maintained all unbeguiled
The fresh heart of a simple child.

Then thought I, "I will surely wait
A little while, that I may see
What hap for this man dubious Fate
May have in store. I wot that he
Must have some secret potent charm,
Possessing which, he dreads no harm."

And yet, methought, it was not so,
But something native to his mind
That gave him power to see and know
What the masks hid,—to look behind,
As if, indeed, no mask were there,
To the true face, were't foul or fair.

And well the masquers knew his power,
For, when the man upon them gazed,
I saw them start, and shrink, and cower,
Perplexed, affrighted, stunned, and dazed;

And e'en the boldest looked askance
Rather than meet that gentle glance.

But of all strange things I must tell
This was the strangest,—that the men
On whom those calm sweet glances fell
Were stirred to sudden wrath; and when
His eyes strayed from them, straight appealed
Against the man with face concealed.

For masks were faces in their sight,
And his true face to them was masked;
They felt there was a fateful might
Within the man, and each one asked,
"What right hath he this mask to wear,
And catch my secret in his snare?"

But he heard not their wild exclaim,
He looked with loving eyes and mild,
Yet sad, as with unselfish shame,
And found at last a little child,

Who peered into the veilless face,
Loved it, and flew to his embrace.

It seemed this gentle child and he
Had a strange kinship of their own,
And each to each was company,
And neither felt himself alone:
So through the masked and mocking band
The twain passed gaily, hand in hand.

And then the vision faded quite
Away; the man and child were gone;
And gone into the dreamful night
The masquers I had gazed upon.
But surely on some other shore
I shall behold that face once more.

A RONDEL OF GOOD CHEER

Let others drone a mournful song,
We chant a carol blithe and gay;
What should we gain were we to say
"Whatever is, is surely wrong"?
For one thing only will we long—
Content—to cheer a darksome day;
Let others drone a mournful song,
We chant a carol blithe and gay.

"The good is weak, the ill is strong,
All things of beauty haste away,"—

Too well we know the dreary lay
But will not join the wailing throng;
Let others drone a mournful song,
We chant a carol blithe and gay.

A WINTER RONDEAU

THESE wintry days for us, dear friends,
Have secret charms that make amends
For loss of Summer's warmth and light:
The skies are dull, but much of bright
And beautiful the Winter lends.

No more, no more, my spirit bends
To worship gods the Summer sends;
I celebrate, in June's despite,
These wintry days.

For while the year to Yule descends,
With frosty air there somehow blends

A heart-warmth warmer than the blaze
That in my fire this moment plays:
Sad shall I be when April ends
These wintry days.

VILLANELLE

Life, thou art vaguely strangely sweet,
Thy gladness fills our throbbing veins,
But Death comes on with footsteps fleet.

With rapture men each morning greet,
And spite of losses, cares and pains,
Life, thou art vaguely strangely sweet.

We, while with health our pulses beat,
Heed not the falling hour-glass grains,
But Death comes on with footsteps fleet.

Our lips may say "Life is a cheat,"
But 'tis of Death our heart complains,
Life, thou art vaguely strangely sweet.

For one hour more do men entreat,
As life within them quickly wanes,
But Death comes on with footsteps fleet.

Many we miss, but him we meet,
He is a guest whom nought detains;
Life, thou art vaguely strangely sweet,
But Death comes on with footsteps fleet.

FATHER AND CHILD

The wife of Peter Wright, one of the men who perished in the Southport life-boat, 10th December 1886, was prematurely confined on the day following the disaster; and the baby, which was still-born, was placed on its father's arm as he lay in his coffin and buried with him.

FATHER and child together lie at rest,
The storm-worn man, the babe all undefiled;
God's voice has blessed them and they shall be blest—
Father and child.

When by fierce wind black wave on wave was piled,
And Death came hurrying on the billow's crest,
One passed to peace amid the tempest wild.

Storm-spared, the other finds a tranquil nest,
And now to both Death's face seems sweet and mild;
Calmly they sleep, man's breast to baby's breast—
Father and child.

POEMS OF THE INNER LIFE

THE GREAT LOGICIAN

THERE lived in our city a great logician,
He argued by day and he argued by night;
He scorned our illogical opposition,
And proved to us clearly that he was right.

Logic is logic; and he was so clever
That the light of our faith grew pale and dim:
We put away God—we thought for ever,
But we still had logic,—we still had him.

Indeed our state would have been perfection,
But somehow we couldn't abolish pain,
Nor sorrow, nor death; and in weak dejection
Some of us wished to have God again.

It had been a help, there was no denying—
That fiction which logic had driven away:
When faith seemed dead and hope was dying
We felt half tempted to kneel and pray.

We yearned for God and the faith that had vanished;
We longed for help in our arduous strife;
We knew that by logic both had been banished,
And logic is logic, but life is life.

And so we said to the great logician,
"We cannot argue these things away;
We thought we had knocked them out of position,
But 'tis somehow a failure—for there they stay.

"'Tis a wretched sham of an incantation
That is wrought by your divining rod;
Hear in our verdict your condemnation:—
Logic is logic, but God is God."

UNFORGOTTEN

Why is it that thy once bright face doth darken
Into the blackness of a drear despair?
Tell me not God is deaf or doth not hearken
Unto the wailing of thy speechless prayer.

I will not hear thee say the heavens are brazen,
That thy weak cry rises to Him in vain,
That where love's banner waved is now the blazon
Of fiery wrath or cold divine disdain.

Believe not that in this extremest anguish
He who in days of old spake peace to thee
Will suffer thee for evermore to languish,
Nor raise his strong right arm to set thee free.

Know'st thou the meaning of that word once written?
Know'st thou the mystery of His gracious name?—
Jesus—the Saviour—for thy sake death-smitten,
Yesterday, now, and evermore—the same.

He is the same; with thee is the betraying;
From thee He hideth not, but thou from Him;
Once more to show Himself He is essaying,
But faithless tears have made thine eyesight dim.

Then once more raise thine eyes and look above thee;
When faith and memory in thine heart have met
Then thou wilt know that still thy Lord doth love thee:
Thou hast forgotten; Christ doth not forget.

THE CHRISTIAN'S SONG OF LIFE

"For me to live is Christ,"
So wrote the old Apostle, knowing well
The world's joys he had priced,
And then had chosen fetters and a cell.

The ruler of this world
Offered his gifts; he would not be enticed,
But in one sentence hurled
Them all away—"For me to live is Christ.'

Once there had been a time
When in the Crucified he saw no grace,—
Moved not by the sublime
Rapt ecstasy on dying Stephen's face.

But on that lonely road,
Which led to far Damascus, he was stayed
By One who sadly showed
To him the five wounds which his sin had made.

"Saul, Saul," a sad voice said:
"Who art Thou, Lord," the stricken Saul replied;
Then fell to earth as dead,
Knowing at last the Lord he had defied.

He died in that great hour;
The world's breath, which had been the life of Saul,
Lost all its ancient power,
And was but death: Christ was his life, his all.

Yes; and there was a day
When I too thought the world had me sufficed;
Mine eyes were turned away,
Nor saw the loving yearning face of Christ.

I thought that I was strong,
Nor needed I to beg for strength Divine;
So thought I, but ere long
My Lord made weakness of that strength of mine.

He made me weak, to show
My fond heart how it might be strong at length;
His secret now I know,
For in my weakness He is made my strength.

I thought that I had life;
My blood flowed warm and quick, my heart beat high;
Foremost in every strife
For mastery; who was so proud as I?

Now indeed am I dead,
Nay, rather, now alive to die no more;
My death is captive led;
Christ's life is mine; 'twas death that reigned before.

Yes; and a solemn change
Has overspread my world, for now, whene'er
My wandering footsteps range
To haunts that once were lone, my Lord is there.

Oft in the busy street
I hear a voice—I know He passes by;
And then, O moment sweet,
To me, even to me, He draweth nigh.

I see Him in my joy;
I see Him when mine eyes with tears are dim;
If the world me annoy,
It cannot touch my life, 'tis hid in Him.

O strangest of things strange,
This sweet death, and this sweeter life of mine;
This death to chance and change,
Life to the chanceless, changeless, the divine.

What words of earthly lays
Can magnify enough the life thus given,
Which makes all earthly days
Empty of earth, and earth itself a heaven?

What better words than these
Which for the great Apostle once sufficed,
The mystery of his peace
To celebrate—"For me to live is Christ!"

Lord Jesus, for this thing
I thank Thee, that I now can speak with Paul;
Nay, I will rather sing,
Speech is so poor,—"Christ is my life, my all."

A HYMN OF BEAUTY

WRITTEN FOR THE LITTLE ONES AT WINTERSDORF

God of Beauty, Thou hast spread
Beauty round us everywhere;
Not alone by daily bread
Live we, but by all things fair.
Father, Thou dost call the least
Of Thy children to the feast.

When on us Thy sun doth shine
Fill our souls with heavenly light;
When descends the night divine
And the stars are burning bright,
As the stars oh let us be
Faithful ministers of Thee.

Waves the wind among the trees;
Let Thy Spirit on us blow;
We would feel the heavenly breeze,
Which, our hearts rejoice to know,
Is Thy quickening healing breath
Which preserves our soul from death.

In the hedgerows countless flowers
Through the summer bud and bloom,
Glorifying all the hours
With their colour and perfume.
Lord, we would delight Thine eyes,
Make us flowers of Paradise.

In the fields the little lambs
Innocently frisk and play,
While their loving watchful dams
Bleat recall whene'er they stray.
We, Thy lambs, would near Thy side,
Saviour, evermore abide.

Beauty glows where'er we look;
All around, below, above,
In the world's great open book
Every page says "God is love."
Heavenly Father, we would be
Worthy of Thy world and Thee.

As Thy beauty clasps us round
Make us beautiful within;
May our hearts and lives be found
Free from folly, pride, and sin.
Then Thy stars and fields and flowers
Shall indeed be truly ours.

A HYMN FOR EVENING

WRITTEN FOR THE GIRLS AT WINTERSDORF

Lord Jesus, in the days of old
Two walked with Thee in waning light,
And love's blind instinct made them bold
To crave Thy presence through the night;
As night descends we too would pray
"Oh, leave us not at close of day!"

Did not their hearts within them burn,
And, though their Lord they failed to know,
Did not their spirits inly yearn,
They could not let the stranger go;
Much more must we who know Thee pray
"Oh, leave us not at close of day!"

The hours of day are glad and good,
And good the gifts Thy hand bestows,—
The body's health, the spirit's food,
And work, and after work repose;
We would not lose day's golden gains,
So stay with us as daylight wanes.

Perchance we have not always wist
Who has been with us by the way;
Amid day's uproar we have missed
Some word that Thou hast had to say;
In silent night, O Saviour dear,
We would not fail Thy voice to hear.

Yet if, like Cleopas and he,
The twain who fared with clouded eyes,
We see not that we walk with Thee,
Then, Master, as a glad surprise,
Break bread for us that we may know,
And, knowing, pray Thee not to go.

Day is far spent and night is nigh,
Stay with us, Saviour, through the night,
Talk with us, touch us tenderly,
Lead us to peace, to rest, to light;
Dispel our darkness with Thy face,
Radiant with resurrection grace.

Nor this night only, blessed Lord,
We, every day and every hour,
Would walk with Thee Emmausward
To hear Thy voice of love and power;
And every night would by Thy side
Look, listen, and be satisfied.

THE SHEPHERD AND THE LAMBS

A PARABLE

Unto the margin of the flowing river
The Eastern shepherd leads his timid sheep;
He calls them on but they stand still and shiver,
To them the stream seems wide, and swift, and deep.

He calls them on, but they in fear are standing;
He calls them on, but on they dare not go;
They heed not now the voice of his commanding,
They only heed the river's fearful flow.

Then from the side of one protecting mother
A lamb the shepherd takes unto his breast;
And then he gently bends and takes another,
And in his arms the two lambs lie at rest.

They lie at rest, and, as he close enfolds them,
He bears them safely o'er the river wide;
The little lambs know well the arm that holds them,
They nestle warmly and are satisfied.

Then the fond mothers, with maternal longing,
Look on beyond that river's fearful flow;
They can but follow and, behind them thronging,
Their fleecy comrades are in haste to go.

Drawn by a love stronger than any shrinking,
Their lambs they follow o'er the flowing tide;
They heed not now the swimming or the sinking,
They brave the stream and reach the farther side.

And, while their tender shepherd kindly feeds them,
They think no longer upon what hath been;
He gives them back their lambs and then he leads them
By the still waters, through the pastures green.

So shall it be with you, O weeping mother,
Whose lamb the Lord has taken from your sight;
'Tis He hath done it, He and not another,
Your lamb lies in His arms clasped close and tight.

Across the stream the little one is taken
That you may fear no more the quick dark flow,
But that with steadfast heart and faith unshaken
You may be ready after it to go.

This is the tender Shepherd's loving pleasure,
To bless at once the little lamb and you:
He knows that when with Him is your best treasure
There fixed for ever will your heart be too.

A LEGEND AND A LESSON

On Salem's towers the sun shines bright,
The Western sky is full of light,
The white moon comes before the night.

And while the sun is sinking low
The hurrying crowds run to and fro,
And toil-worn labourers homeward go.

The Pharisee devout is there,
The Naz'rite, with his unshorn hair,
The Levite, come from evening prayer.

But what is it detains the crowd?
Why ring those angry voices loud?
Why gathers on those brows the cloud?

Why shrinks the Pharisee in dread?
What turns away the Naz'rite's head?
A dog lies in the pathway—dead!

"The unclean beast! how came it here?"
The Levite asks: the people fear
To see pollution brought so near.

Each gazes with disgust and hate,
Each whispers to his nearest mate,
Each seems to dread some coming fate.

Then One moves lonely through the throng;
With eyes divine He gazes long—
Eyes in whose depths is seen no wrong.

He gazes, and those eyes are bright
With love's clear, calm, celestial light:—
"Its teeth," He says, "as pearls are white!"

And listening to that piercing word,
They learned that hour that with the Lord
No meanest creature is abhorred.

And we may learn the lesson still,
That in no ill thing all is ill,
But he may see the good who will.

We shape our lips in scornful curl,
And from our pure proud presence hurl
The thing in which He finds a pearl.

Christ, touch our eyes that we may see
With Thy true vision: may we be
From loveless blindness ever free.

Yea, blessed Lord, help us to learn
Thy secret, that we may not turn
From those for whom Thy love doth burn.

WRITTEN IN MY FRIENDS' BOOKS

In *Poems of the Inner Life*

The poets of the spirit speak for all,
And if by stretch of intervening space
We three are severed, still the rhythmic word
Of aspiration, yearning, faith and love
Is yours and ours alike, and so this book
Is bond between us. When you read some strain
That speaks for *you*, say "It is *theirs* as well,"
And, saying so, know that we three are one.

In *Poems* by Edward Dowden

A spirit strong and true and gentle speaks
In this fair volume, whose good fate it is
To find a quiet home with one whose ear
Is kindred with the poet's heart and voice—
Take it, dear friend; 'tis his, 'tis ours, 'tis yours;—
Ours most in being his and yours as well.

In William Sharp's *Sonnets of this Century*

The Sonnet, say the poets, is a plot
Of ground, a wave, the coin of a king:
Which metaphor you choose it matters not,
'Tis in plain prose a good and pleasant thing.
In a propitious hour, to cosy nook,
O sonnet lover, take this little book:
When greatness wearies—then, and only then
Turn to such smaller fry as

J. A. N.

In *The Golden Butterfly*, by Walter Besant and James Rice

Take, dear friend, this book we read together
In the quiet of the heavenly April,
When you took us from the fret and fever,
Loosed the burden which had grown so heavy,
Brought us here into the peace and stillness
Of the tranquil fields and lakes and mountains,
Where Winander sleeps, and where the sunsets
O'er the Langdales give a glimpse of heaven.
While we read the pages of the story
How our laughter rang, yet sometimes

By the might of simple grace and beauty
Tears were almost won from their hid fountains.
Those were good, glad hours, and so, we pray you,
Keep the volume as a little relic
Of the time, and of the friends who love you.

MIDDLERIGG, 27*th April* 1886.

In my Wife's Copy of the Same Book

Dearest, to you and us this book is not
As other books, for in your inmost heart
And ours it stands alone. In this sweet spot
We read the tale together, and 'tis part
Of the fair memory of a bygone day
That is not dead but lives with us for aye.

Middlerigg, Troutbeck.

To my Wife, on her Birthday, in *The Chaplain of the Fleet*, by the same Authors

In sad times long ago, dear wife,
You read aloud this tale to me;
To-day, when once again our life
Is glad, I give the book to thee.
May many birthdays so divine
In future years be thine and mine.

To my Wife, on the Twelfth Anniversary of our Wedding-Day, Written in *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, by Walter Besant

This author called his tale "impossible,"
And yet, O dearest one, I know full well,
With twelve years' knowledge, how love's magic might
Can make of home a Palace of Delight.

In a Selection from the *Poems* of Wordsworth

Of all heaven's gifts what shall we choose as best?
This poet's happy dower of Faith and Rest.

IN MEMORIAM

PHILIP

ON PHILIP'S TOMBSTONE

KEEP him, Lord Christ, close to Thy loving bosom ;
Lift up the hiding veil, and let us see
The little face, fair as a fresh spring blossom,
Then bring us one day to our boy and Thee.

TO PHILIP IN HEAVEN

My boy, on this sweet silent autumn even,
I sit and muse upon a bygone joy;
Joy there is still for thee with Christ in heaven,
Sorrow on earth for me, my boy, my boy.

Is it all joy? Doth not some childish longing
Cloud thy dear face of sweetness past compare;
Even with loving angels round thee thronging
Dost thou not want thy father with thee there?

"Papa! mamma!" I seem to hear thee crying
Amid the swelling of the angels' song;
O dost thou hear my call to thee replying,
"Be patient, darling, we will not be long!"

We do but wait to hear the welcome calling
Of Christ's dear voice which won thee from our side;
We wait the summons from the heavens down-falling,
"Come and with Me and him for aye abide."

Time us from thee and thee from us dost sever,
But time shall know a death thou hast not known,—
A death which lasts through all the great for ever
Of love that we shall spend before the throne.

So now, my boy, on this sweet autumn even,
I will gaze forward to the coming joy,—
To years that have no end with God in heaven,
With Christ, thy mother, thee, my boy, my boy.

RELICS:

A MOTHER'S TRIOLET

This is the whip my sweet boy had
And wooden horse he loved to ride;
Why do they mock and call me mad?
This is the whip my sweet boy had.
He comes each night, my little lad,
But morning takes him from my side;
This is the whip my sweet boy had
And wooden horse he loved to ride.

AUTUMN 1885

Yes, Autumn comes again and finds me here,
Last year I thought I should be otherwhere
Than 'mid these fading falling leaves; for there,
Beneath life's tree whose leaves are never sere
But green throughout the great eternal year
I thought to lie, and breathe the tranquil air,
And see my boy who, being for earth too fair,
Is fairer still in that celestial sphere.

Perchance for me his little heart did yearn;
Haply to meet me at the golden gate
He oft would wander, stand awhile, and turn
Away to cry, "My father lingers late."
Content thee, little one; my heart doth burn
For thee as thine for me, but God says "Wait!"

SONNETS

A CHARACTER—AND A QUESTION

A DUBIOUS, strange, uncomprehended life,
A roll of riddles with no answer found,
A sea-like soul which plummet cannot sound,
Torn with belligerent winds at mutual strife.
The god in him hath taken unto wife
A daughter of the pit, and,—strongly bound
In coils of snake-like hair about him wound—
Dies, straining hard to raise the severing knife.

For such a sunken soul what room in heaven?
For such a soaring soul what place in hell?
Can these desires be damned, these doings shriven,
Or in some lone mid-region must he dwell
For ever? Lo! God sitteth with the seven
Stars in His hand, and shall not He judge well?

GEORGE ELIOT

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1880

Thy prayer is granted: thou hast joined the Choir
Invisible; the Choir whose music makes
Life's discords grow to harmonies, and takes
Us unawares with sounds that are as fire
And light and melody in one. We tire
Of weary noon and night, of dawn that breaks
Only to bring again the cares, the aches,
The meannesses that drag us to the mire:

When lo! amid life's din we catch thy clear
Large utterance from the lucid upper air,
Bidding us wipe away the miry stain,
And scale the stainless stars, and have no fear
Save the one dread of forfeiting our share
In the deep joy that follows noble pain.

ONLY A WOMAN'S HAIR

"Only a woman's hair!"—*Dean Swift.*

"A special despatch to the *Tagblatt* states that Wagner's body was laid in the coffin at half-past twelve by the widow herself, who last night cut off the beautiful hair her husband so admired, and placed it in a red satin cushion under the head of the departed."—*Standard*, 17th February 1883.

"Only a woman's hair!" We may not guess
If 'twere a mocking sneer, or the sharp cry
Of a great heart's o'ermastering agony
That spake in these four words. Nevertheless,
One thing we know,—that the long clinging tress
Had lived with Stella's life in days gone by,
And, she being dead, lived on to testify
Of Love's victorious everlastingness.

Such love, O mute musician, doth provide
For thy dear head's repose a pillow rare:
With red of heart's blood is the covering dyed,
While underneath—canst thou not feel it there?—
The rippling wavy wealth that was thy pride,
Now Love's last gift—"Only a woman's hair."

BARREN DAYS

What of these barren days which bring no flowers
To gladden with fair tints and odours sweet,—
No fruits that with their virgin bloom entreat
Violence from rose-red lips that in dim bowers
Pout with a thirsty longing? Summer showers
Softly but vainly fall about my feet,
The air is languid with the summer heat
That warms in vain:—what of these barren hours?

I know not: I can wait nor haste to know,
The daily vision serves the daily need;
It may be some revealing hour shall show
That while my sad sick heart did inly bleed
Because no blossom came nor fruit did grow
An angel hand had sowed celestial seed.

BACCHUS

FOR A PAINTING OF THE GOD

Yes, there is he, the wine-god, there the face
Our poet sang of once as ever fair
And young; I see the lofty look, the godlike air,
Which hint of high Olympus, but I trace
Not less a haunting humanness of grace;
And though no faintest lines of earthly care
Mar the divine, calm countenance, yet there
A human gladness seems to find a place.

The gladness of the vineyard and the vine,
The gladness of the festal flower-crowned bowl,
The gladness of fair maidens as they twine
Garlands and sing glad songs from a glad soul.
What face more truly human, more benign?
But lo! around his head the aureole.

LIFE AND DEATH AND LOVE

THREE strange shapes wandered through my waking
dream,
The first a ruddy youth, lusty and strong,
Who laughed and leaped and sang a joyous song,
With glance upturned to brave noon's blinding beam.
The last shape, veiled from head to foot, did seem
The swift avenger of some nameless wrong,
And, the veil parting as he passed along,
His eyes met mine with chill Medusa gleam.

Between these twain a fair boy, chapleted
With strange flowers gathered in some mystic grove,
Who touched a viol softly, while he fled
From the veiled form behind, and ever strove
To join the youth before him. Then I said
Surely these three are Life and Death and Love.

AUT CÆSAR AUT NULLUS

Cæsar or nothing! Brother say not so;
By such mad speech thou dost thy spirit wrong:
Such words are not for thee who art too strong,
Manly and true to let thy soul sink low,
Missing the highest. There is bitter woe
For every son of man who turns his back
On his ideal: therefore, though the track
Lead to no regal goal, still onward go.

Not thine to fix how high thy state shall be,
Not thine, perchance, to feel the Cæsar crown
Clasping thine upturned brow; thou ne'er may'st see
The purple from thy shoulders falling down;
But it *is* thine to live right royally,
King of thyself, and gain a king's renown.

POETRY—AND POETRY

Deep in the wood upon a bank I lay
Reading a poet's verses in a nook
Fit for a fairy revel; but the book
Fell from my hand ere long; the ceaseless play
Of glancing sunlight which did never stay
A moment on each leaf, the sleepy hum
Of insects, all the sights and sounds that come
To woodland wanderers drew my mind away.

Those written poems seemed all incomplete,
For in all things around—sky, trees and lake,
Which glittered far below—there seemed to beat
A heart that throbbed as if 'twould almost break
With God's own poetry, sublime and sweet:
I heard as in a dream nor cared to wake.

LIFE IN NATURE

It cannot surely be that they are dead—
Those far-off hills on which the sunshine broods;
These tangled trees; that lake whose varying moods
Of deep still calm or sudden tempest shed
Strange influence. I gaze, and I am led
Out of myself; there seems in them a life
Which answers unto mine, and the wild strife
Which stirred my soul an hour ago has fled.

Oh! that for once this dulled and deadened ear
Might be attuned to catch their mystic speech;
But I am bound by sense, and only hear
The lake waves plashing on the pebbly beach;
And, though all nature lives and speaks, I fear
Her deepest wisdom lies just out of reach.

THE THREADS OF LIFE

WHAT things have made me what I am to-day?
What threads cast cunningly across the loom
Of circumstance by the quick hand of Doom
Have wrought into the pattern tints so gay
And colours dull and sober; gold and gray;
Here strange designs worked in with threads of gloom
And here white blossoms full of fresh sweet bloom
As hawthorn-blossom from the woods in May?

Some threads I see; I find them one by one;
Thoughts I have welcomed, words that I have said,
The deeds both fair and foul that I have done—
These make the pattern o'er the fabric spread:
And though from Memory's grasp some threads are gone
One day they too shall be remembered.

LOVE'S DAY

This is Love's house, and this Love's hour of bliss:
Through the dark grove her windows shine like stars;
List to those flute-players, mark well the bars
Of that sweet prelude, each note like a kiss,
That longer grows and tenderer till you miss
The music in the passion. Nothing jars
On soul or sense; no fateful boding mars
Joy's perfectness: what end shall be of this?

Love hath her day, but Love's day vanisheth;
Vacant her chambers now, below, above;
Her flutes no longer breathe melodious breath;
Dark are her windows now as is the grove;
And echoes of the falling feet of Death
Reverberate through the empty house of Love.

SELF REVELATION

Thy tears are vain, dear friend, thou canst not yet
With all thy toil set to articulate words
Thy nature's music—canst not make its chords
To any listener audible. Eyes wet
As thine with this same sorrow oft have met
Mine with sad yearning for an answering glance
Of insight; then a wild look cast askance
At the deep gulph that is between us set.

The gulph remains, 'tis best it should remain,
That while this foul clay-clothing wraps us round
Our brethren's eyes should evermore be dim
As they gaze on us; but when free from stain
We rise, and in Christ's likeness pure are found,
We can reveal ourselves to them—and Him.

TWO SIDES OF A LOVE

I

DEAREST, a dreadful fear clouds my sad soul,
A fear that I have striven to put away
From me, and yet it grows from day to day.
Hourly I hear a bell that seems to toll
The knell of my great bliss. Over me roll
Dark waves of terror. O God, can it be
That I, who with sweet tears have praisèd Thee
For his deep love, have lured him to a shoal
And wrecked his life? I would not have thee waste
Thy days, O dear one; I would have thee taste

Life's cup of blessing; for thou knowest well
How little I can give thee; thou dost lose
By love that brings but sorrow, therefore choose
The fuller life, the joys that in it dwell.

II

My love for thee, O loved one, is no waste
Of life. Nay, only in that love I find
My fullest deepest life, while far behind
Lie lifeless days which one by one did haste
Away from me unused; days all defaced
By weakness and by folly, oft by sin;
But when I met thee these dull days did win
A novel glory; they were then first graced
By heavenly colouring; their poisonous gray
Was changed to a rich crimson by a ray
Of God's light shining through thee. Unto Him
I offer praise for ever Who has given
Thee unto me, with thee a present heaven,
And a fair foresight of the seraphim.

SEEKING REST

Thus saith my soul :—The path is long to tread,
Behind me far it stretches, far before ;
Drearily, wearily, sight travels o'er
Leagues that have lengthened as the slow days sped,
And wearily o'er leagues untraversèd,
Which I must traverse ere I gain the door
That shuts not night or day. What need I more
Than to find rest at last in that last bed?

Is it well said, O soul? The way is long ;
Weary are heart and brain and aching feet ;
But though thy heart be weary it is strong,
And sleep unearned is shameful ; so entreat
One thing—that at the last the conqueror's song
May lull thee to a rest divinely sweet.

LOVE AND DEATH

SONNET FOR A PAINTING BY G. F. WATTS, R.A.

This is the house of Life, and at its door
Young Love keeps anxious watch, while outside stands
One who with firm importuning demands
An entrance. Strange is he, but Love with lore
Taught by quick terror names him Death; and o'er
Love's face there comes a cloud, and the small hands
Would bar the door; for he from loveless lands
Is foe to Love, now and for evermore.

Nay, not for evermore! Love is but young,
And young Love sees alone what youth *can* see:
With age Love's vision grows more clear and strong,
And he discerns that this same Death whom he
Had thought his foe, striving to do him wrong,
Comes with the gift of immortality.

LOVE AND ABSENCE

Let it not grieve thee, dear, to hear me say
'Tis false that absence maketh the fond heart
More fond; that when alone and far apart
From thee, I love thee more from day to day.
Not so; for then my heart would ever pray
For longer separation, that I might
In absence from thee gain the utmost height
Of love unrealised; nor would I stay
In my swift course, but onward I would press,
Until I touched with eager hand the goal
Of possible passion. Did I love thee less,
Then might I love thee more; but now my soul
Is filled throughout with perfect tenderness:
No part of me thou hast, but the full whole.

A PROBLEM

A PEDANT'S problem, empty, sterile, dull,
I set my heart to solve :—whether in those
Fair and delightsome things the spirit knows
As things of beauty—say, the flowers we cull
In gracious gardens at the noonday lull,
The babe's first smile, or daylight's solemn close,—
Beauty's true essence dwells in these fair shows
Or in the soul that sees them beautiful.

From such dull task my heart shall now be free ;
What gain in asking riddles o'er and o'er
That never by man's wit can answered be ?
Away with pedant questions ; love's own lore
Feeds love's own hunger, and, dear Love, in thee
Beauty's sweet self I find, and seek no more.

A SUPREME HOUR

THE bounteous Summer gives to me a day
Long waited for, long known in dim sweet dreams:
Now 'tis a dream no more, and yet it seems
As if the hour and I were far away,—
As if with soundless footfall I did stray
Through a strange land whose sun sheds ghostly gleams
On misty hills, dark valleys, sleeping streams,
And shapes with shadowy life, not sad nor gay.

'Tis ever thus in hours whose running sands
Each tell a joy new-born with every breath;
The full soul pants to burst its being's bands,
And so, to seize the bliss that vanisheth,
Life stands on tip-toe, and her outstretched hands
Clasp the down-reaching hands of Sleep and Death.

NOTE

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